2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

RELIGION

Pre-Christian Beliefs[1]

The pre-Christian beliefs of the Yakut were closely associated with their mode of life, which was conditioned by the nature of their habitat. The greater part of the Yakut tribe occupied the Amga-Lena elevated plateau. Their occupations and religion were adapted to their environment. The surface of the plateau represents a complicated system of rivulets and brooks separated from each other by vast forested hills and surrounded by mountain ridges. The Yakut distinguish two kinds of land formation: the *urăx* (rivulet), grass covered lowland, and *alas*, somewhat higher plains surrounded by forests interspersed with lakes. 771 ●

The abundance of grass, animals, and birds in the woods and of fish in the numerous lakes, influenced Yakut economic activity. They were cattle-breeders, hunters, and fishermen. In the early historic period they had four or five times as many horses as horned cattle; at present the number of horned cattle is several times greater than that of horses. The Yakut concept of their spiritual world was based on their material surroundings. Natural phenomena, water and land, animals and plants, and the fate of men are directed by independent beings called "owners." The Yakut pantheon includes the following supernatural beings:— 776

Ajy, creative beings
Icci, masters
Abasy, eaters, malevolent beings
Yŏr, man's soul after death

Side by side with them we find the remnants of an earlier conception of the world as being composed of animate beings: *tañara*, sky; *āhā* (grandmother), river; and *uslo*, mountains. We also find *xaya iccita*, the mountain owner, and the germs of more involved ideas: *Ürüñ Ajy Toyon*, White Creator Lord; *Ulūtuyar Ulū Toyon*, Titular Horrible Lord. Not quite clear and somewhat doubtful appears *Arsan Duolai*, the terrible dweller of the underground world. However, only the *Ajy*, *Icci*, *Yŏr*, and *Abasy* play a conspicuous rôle in Yakut life. [774]

Where do these beings dwell? The Yakut have a clear idea of the chief and cardinal points (*diāki* or *diākkī*) and their intermediates and also of relative heights. The chief cardinal points are: *ilin*, east (literally, the front, front part); *arhā*, west (and at the same time, the back, the back part); *xotu*, north, for which is sometimes substituted the word, *xañas*, the left side; *sohurū*, south, which is occasionally replaced by the 823 776

[1]This section is based chiefly on V. M. Jonov's article in the *Publications du Musée d'Anthropologie et d'Ethnographie de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de Petrograd.*

6: Sauer--115-116 G-5 (1785-94) 1802 Yakut
116, 771, 776, 821, 825

"The Socha regard themselves as in a perfect state of demonocracy. In general conversation, they call God, Tanghra; a church, Tanghra Dshi, God's house; and Sundays, Tanghra Kuin, God's day. I could not obtain any explanation of the attributes of Tanghra. Those of other gods they explain as follows:

Aar Toyon (the merciful chief) : To him they attribute the creation, and suppose him to have a wife, whom they call Kubey Chatoon (shining in glory): they are both all-mighty. --Another god, named Wechsyt (the advocate), carries up their prayers, and executes the resolutions of the godhead: Wechsyt, they say, used frequently to appear among them, and still continues now and then to shew himself, assuming the form of a white stallion, or different birds, from the eagle to the cuckoo. --Shessugai Toyon (the protector): he intercedes for them, and procures all desirable things, as children, cattle, riches, as well as all good and com-[116]fortable things: his wife they call Aksyt (the giver). --These are their benevolent gods; and I may add to the number a being which they adore in the sun: to these they offer sacrifices only once a year."

9: Stadling--96 E-3 (1898) 1901 Yakut
116, 177, 756, 771, 781

"At the present day the Yakuts are often married in churches according to the orthodox ritual, and they also bury their dead in the Russian manner. For the last hundred years they have been nominally members of the othodox Church, and very often make the sign of the Cross, but in their inmost hearts they have stronger faith in the power of the Shaman over the evil spirits than in the dogmas of the Church, of which they know but little. Indeed, not only the Yakuts, but even the Russians themselves — the officials, too, among the number — apply to the Shaman to heal their diseases, drive away evil spirits, and predict coming events."

10: Bush--300 T-3 (1865-67) 1871 Yakut
116, 177, 756, 771,

"The Russians were a long time in conquering them, but, since that event, they have adopted the Russian language, customs, and religion, and are quite devout, though many of them still retain a lingering belief in shamanism."

10: Bush--300 [4] T-3 (1865-67) 1871 Yakut
116, 771, 778, 782, 824

"Their religion was very similar to that of the other Siberian tribes, though they did not worship carved idols like the Tungusians. They offered sacrifices to one great invisible God, of whom each tribe had an image, with a stuffed bag for a body, surmounted by a huge hideous head. All trees they looked upon as sacred objects, and uncommonly fine ones they used to decorate with various trinkets."

14: Krauss--166 [3] E-5 (no date) 1888 Yakut
116, 554, 756, 771, 821

In view of the permanent uncertainty of his supplies, the Yakut is necessarily always occupied with the question whether the impending hunt or draught will be sufficient to provide food for himself and his family. The shaman will offer his services to answer this question. How could those little-civilized people who have a strong tendency towards miracle religion, renounce it to take their own profit from it? Especially, when frightful and inconceivable phenomena such as snow storms or the north-light confuse them and keep them in constant fear.

Permanent remoteness from other people makes the Yakut reflective. He is always alone with his ideas; so it is only natural that his mental activity is great, his imagination vivid. He longs for the mysterious, for mysticism. This is where the shamans find their field of activity.

Thus, the shaman is approached on the ground of his quality as a physician, fortune-teller, and mediator of secret knowledge; not at all, however, because he is a sacrificial priest or a theologian. The shaman himself endeavors to meet these needs, which make his presence among the population indispensable; and that is why he loses his former character as a priest.

14: Krauss--166 [4] E-5 (no date) 1888 Yakut
116, 756, 771

Shamanism and the fragments of Christian popular religion, on both of which the Yakuts may inform curious explorers, do not at all represent two entirely different systems of the primitive religious philosophy of the Yakut aborigines, but are just two parts of their faith, namely the practical, and the dogmatical one. Both parts are in different degrees of decay: Shamanism is less degenerated than the rest.

14: Krauss--166-167 E-5 (no date) 1888 Yakut
116, 177, 182, 756, 771, 776

Besides the mentioned points, Shaman medicine, fortune-telling, and the like, have had a constant influence on everyday life, and certain compromises with Christianity could not fail to [167] develop. Christianity has more or less been adopted by the majority of the Yakuts; it has undergone some changes under the influence of the "ancient faith" followers. As the theoretical part of the former creed has no immediate point of friction with real life, it has survived in a much more considerable degree, in the form of various traditions.

Thus, the former deities have been changed into devils, or spirits of darkness, under the influence of shaman mystery ceremonies. This is the same sort of metamorphosis which our rusalki, lesije, or domovje, or among the Greeks: Pan, have undergone by lending their appearance to the devil of the Christian faith.

These remarks will be sufficient to clear up certain divergences between the shamans' activity and the well attested information on the original religious doctrines of the Yakuts.

14: Krauss--167 E-5 (no date) 1888 Yakut
116, 177, 756, 771, 793

In the Yakut district all Yakuts with rare exceptions have been baptized according to the 'ancient faith' [RCH: i. e., Christianity] rite, or were born from parents of that faith. Yet one can hardly be sure that a Yakut, professing the ancient faith, has given up his shamanist creed, or that he does not have recourse to the latter. I have personally known two shamans, one of them in the Yakutsk district, the other on the Kytach island on the mouth of the Lena, who were both known as followers of the 'ancient faith.'

The aborigines seldom have an opportunity to see a priest of the ancient faith. In view of the enormous extension of the parishes, of the scattered settlements, and of the extraordinary difficulties in securing communications, he is hardly in a position to see each member of his faith once a year; and if he visits him in one of the settling-places he may not stay longer than two or three days because he must be through with his travel as long as the paths and roads are practicable. One may safely estimate that eight per cent of the aborigines population has never seen a Christian church. His eminency, the former Yakut bishop Dionysius even told me that sometimes priests had died without having communicated, leaving a written confession of sins.

No wonder, therefore, that the aborigines who are considered as Christians and place the image of a saint in the front corner of their tents which is adorned with wax candles nevertheless approach their shamans in order to satisfy their religious needs.

14: Krauss--167-168 E-5 (no date) 1888 Yakut
116, 177, 557, 624, 771, 829

It is difficult to admit that the autochthonous Yakut who is so conservative in all his customs and convictions and has not changed his manners and way of life during the centuries, should have yielded so easily in his religious belief. If the Yakut professes the Christian faith because the ruling class professes it and would not sanction the election of a delegate in the village community other than orthodox, and because only for Christians there is a chance to get once a decoration [168] (medal) from that white Tsar, who somewhere, very far, lives in a tent of glass, and, sitting on a gigantic tabouret of sugar, sucks sugar unceasingly--if, I repeat, the Yakut poses as a Christian in order to become the boss of those who surround him, such practical considerations do by no means convince him that it is necessary to give up his shamanism and to approach the latter faith as soon as he feels prompted; particularly because he will not find a similar satisfaction in Christian belief.

14: Krauss--168 [3] E-5 (no date) 1888 Yakut
116, 756, 771, 776, 782

I also remember a case where the Yakuts who accompanied me while I was traveling in the Verchojan district, with desperation because of the terrific weather first murmured prayers, calling upon Tangar (God) and Nicholas, God's favorite (Nikolaja Ugodnika), the still honored protector of wandering people, until they started exercising their Shaman magic.

When I asked the people about this rapid change, the sorcerers would calmly reply 'If God doesn't help, the spirits may still hear our prayer, and send aid'. This lack of distinction is, in my opinion, simply accounted for. The people have left one bank without having reached the other; they have not grasped the faith in God, but have given up the faith in the strength and might of their formerly worshiped ghosts to a great extent.

14: Krauss--175 [2] E-5 (no date) 1888 Yakut
116, 756, 771, 828

It is difficult to consider as normal the mental state of the autochthonous Yakuts while they are performing magic ceremonies. I am not able to read from their faces, which otherwise are very vivid, and I can only say that I always wished that the shaman might finish his ceremony, the earlier the better. Imagine the scene: a little tent with a smoking hearth, before the fire, the obsessed fanatic, who is hardly prevented by two youthful men from throwing himself into the fire or at least breaking his head. The unarticulated roaring and the wild cries may upset even a person who has normal nerves. The shaman is so absorbed in his role that he forgets himself completely. He is evidently convinced of his intercourse with the powerful, evil spirits, whom he need not fear; against whose evil, capricious, and otherwise inexorable will he is now to act by using his entire person which he puts at their disposal. Even if one does not admit that Christianized natives always believe in shamanism, it must be said that all of them, without exception, are afraid of it. Persons who are fully reliable even protested they had known a (Christian) priest who had beaten a shaman and the latter had taken vengeance by making the priest become insane.

16: Great Britain Admiralty--168 [4] G-3 (no date) 1920 Yakut
116, 771, 776, 825, 177.77 Russia
636.77

"The Yakuts have been nominally Christian since the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the Tsar declared that they had merited this privilege, of which many of them remained absolutely unconscious. They go to church, but have a very hazy idea of their nominal religion. Their native chief god is Tangra. They have also many malevolent spirits, who are distinguished by the names of colours; cattle and horses are sacred to the spirit whose colour they bear."

24:Wrangell--39 [3] G-3 (1820-23) 1842 Yakut
116, 177, 771, 779

"The Jakuti have almost all been baptized; but, though a part of the New Testament, the Ten Commandments, and several of the canons of the Church, have been translated into their language, as yet the greater number have no idea of the principles and doctrines of Christianity; and their schamans and the superstitions of heathenism still retain their hold upon their minds."

24: Wrangell--192-193 G-3 (1820-23) 1842 Yakut
116, 177, 431, 756, 771

"They [RCH: i.e., the population on the Aniuk River which includes Yakuts] have all been baptized, and conform to the usages of the Russian Church at least once a year, when the different settlements are visited by the priest of Nishne Kolymsk, for the purpose of solemnizing marriages, christenings, and burials, and of administering the Lord's Supper. The journey is a very difficult and laborious one, as it includes a cir-
[193] cuit of many hundred wersts, at the worst season of the year, and in a wild and desert country. It is, however, a very advantageous journey to the priest in a pecuniary point of view, from the number of presents which he receives; it being not uncommon for him to return with two or three sledges laden with the most costly furs, as sables, ermines, foxes, &c."

24: Wrangell--193 G-3 (1820-23) 1842 Yakut
116, 177, 756, 771

"Pagan superstitions have been a good deal checked by the introduction of Christianity, but the belief in the power both of good and evil spirits, and of the schamans, still keeps its ground, and, singularly enough, has extended itself to the Russians. I have even been assured, that a priest who was about to undertake a journey to Irkuzk, applied to a schaman to afford him protection by his art against any accidents on the road! Generally speaking, however, Schamanism has lost its religious character. With the Russians it is for the most part merely a mode of passing away the time, and they send for a schaman to occupy an evening in the practice of his tricks, just as in Europe people send for a conjuror."

40: Burr--151 N-2 (no date) 1931 Yakut
116, 771, 776, 782

"Officially they are all Orthodox Christians, but their primitive Shamanism is but thinly covered, and in the remoter districts of the north the hunters and trappers are probably all still pagan at heart. Their primitive belief is not in God but in Abáhy, that is, evil spirits. The three chief ones were Ühe Abáhy, the Spirit of the Air; Allará Abáhy, the Spirit of the Underworld; and, appropriately enough, Hotugu Abáhy, the Spirit of the North. Their priests, called oyun, made sacrifices of animals to appease these evil spirits to the beating of the düngur, a kind of kettle-drum with little bells attached."

43: Karutz--74 [8] E-2 (no date) 1925 Yakut
116, 771, 821

Intellectual life formerly went entirely on shamanistic lines. Spiritual entities were seen behind the phenomena (particularly by the shamans), behind sun and moon, lightning and thunder, stones and plants, and reached with hymnic, mantram-like songs, in solemn rythmical dances, and in sacrifices. Ancient, esoteric mysticism is still suggested by the use of drums, on the ring of which there are twelve salients, apparently symbolizing the zodiac. Nowadays mental activity is artificially kept awake with the help of coarsely carved figures.

the Yakut system of kinship is close to the systems used by a number of Turkic peoples. 609

The position of women both in the family and in public life was inferior. The husband, the head of the family, enjoyed despotic power, and the wife could not even complain of harsh treatment, which was a fairly common occurrence, if not at the hands of the husband, then at the hands of his relatives. A woman from another tribe, defenseless and lacking in all rights, was burdened with hard work when she became part of a new family. 562

The position of older people who were decrepit and no longer able to work was also difficult. Little care was shown for them, they were given little to eat and poorly clothed, sometimes even reduced to complete destitution. 838

The position of children, despite the fact that the Yakuts loved their children, as pointed out by many observers, was also rather unfortunate. The birth rate was very high among the Yakuts and most families produced from 5 to 10 children, sometimes as many as 20 or even more. However, the bad living conditions, poor food and inattention resulted in very high child mortality. Apart from their own children, many families, particularly those in which there were few children, often adopted children, whom they often simply bought from the poorer people. 853 [163] [165] 597

Newborn babies were washed by the fire in the hearth and rubbed with cream. This operation was repeated fairly frequently later on. The mother breast-fed her child for some time, as long as 4 or 5 years, although in addition the child received a horn of cow's milk. The Yakut cradle was a long box made of thin, bent pieces of wood, in which the wrapped baby was placed, strapped in and left for some time, without being removed. The cradle had a groove to drain away the urine. Older children usually crawled about the earthen floor together with the animals, either half-naked or completely naked, and were left to themselves; sometimes they were attached to the table on a long strap to prevent them from falling into the fire. The children of the poorer people were trained to work from an early age, and had to carry out work according to their strength—such as collecting brush in the forest, looking after smaller livestock, and so on; the girls were trained in domestic duties. The children of the toyons received more attention, were mollycoddled and generally spoiled. 854 [853] 855 184

The children had few toys. These were usually wooden figures of animals, tiny bows and arrows, little houses and model utensils, made by the parents or sometimes by the children themselves; and the girls had dolls with model clothes, blankets, pillows and so on. The games of the Yakut children were simple and rather monotonous. The absence of noisy group games is characteristic; generally speaking, when the children of the poorer Yakuts grew up, they were quiet and sluggish. 524

Religion

Even in the second half of the 18th century, many of the Yakuts had been baptized, and in the 19th century all Yakuts were registered as Orthodox. Although the transition to Orthodoxy was motivated by and large by material considerations (various privileges and grants for those baptized), the new religion gradually became part of their everyday life. In the corner of their dwellings there hung icons; the people wore crucifixes (the large silver crucifix-type embellishments worn by the women are interesting), went to church and many of them, particularly 771

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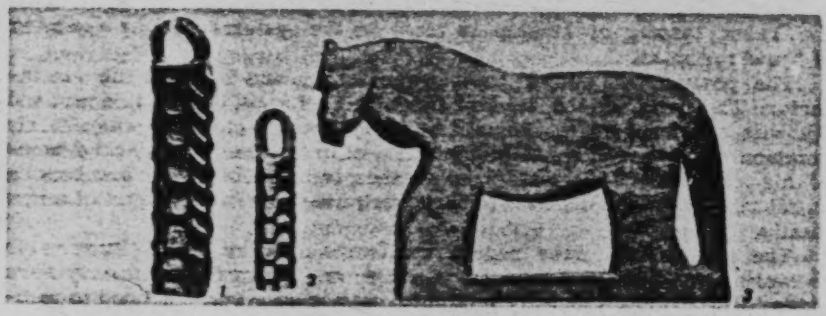

Wooden toys: 1—ox, 2—cow; 3—horse.

● 771 the toyons, were zealous Christians. Actually, this is understandable, since Christianity was far better suited than shamanism to satisfying the class interests of the rich people. Nevertheless, the old, pre-Christian religion did not entirely disappear, and the older beliefs, although somewhat modified through the influence of Christian ideas, still kept their hold; and the shamans, the ministers of the old cult, still enjoyed authority, although they were forced to some extent to conceal their activities from the tsarist administrators and Orthodox clergy. Shamanism and the animistic beliefs associated with it seem to have been the most persistent element of the old Yakut religion.

756 171 The Yakut shamanism was closest of all to the Tungus type. The Yakut shaman tambourine (wide-rimmed and oval) was exactly the same as the Tungus tambourine; the costume was also the Tungus type, except that the Yakut shamans officiated with uncovered heads. The similarity involved more than just their outward appearance; it also showed up in the more important details of the beliefs and rituals.

756 The Yakut shaman (oyuun) was considered the professional attendant of the spirits. According to Yakut belief, anyone chosen by the spirits to serve them could become a shaman, but the shamans were usually from the same families: "in a clan where a shaman has once appeared, he does not pass away," said the Yakuts. Apart from men shamans, there were also women shamans (*yдaşan*), who were considered to be [753] even more powerful. A sign of readiness to adopt the profession of shaman was a nervous ailment, which was interpreted as evidence that the person had been "elected" by the spirits; this was followed by a period of training under the guidance of an old shaman, and finally by a ritual public consecration.

756 776 It was thought that the spirit electing the shaman became his patron spirit (emeget), and that it was the soul of an important shaman who had died earlier. Its image in the form of a flat copper effigy was worn among the other pendants with the shaman costume; the image was also called an emeget. The patron spirit imbues the shaman with strength and knowledge. The shaman sees and hears only through his emeget. Besides the latter, every shaman has his own animal double (iye-kyyl, "mother beast") in the form of an invisible eagle, stallion, bull, bear and so on. Finally, besides these personal spirits, every shaman was associated with a number of other spirits in human or bestial form when casting his spells. The different categories of spirits associated with the shaman's activity had their own specific names.

[753] The most important and largest group of spirits were the abaahy (or abaasy), devouring spirits to whose activity certain diseases were attributed.

421 was considered collective property, particularly in summer when several households nomadized together. Having killed a wild reindeer, the hunter 224 was expected to give up the skin and meat to the families of his group, but 226 keep the head and neck for himself. During the collective trapping of geese or spearing of wild reindeer a representative was chosen to make the division, and everything caught was divided up by families, according to the number of members.

224 The sites to be used by the nomadic groups for their summer hunting and fishing were decided in the spring, before the mosquitoes appeared. The heads of the groups would agree on the places where their own kin would hunt. Under this system each group hunted in new areas each year. Ownership of the polar-fox traps took a different form. The traps were private property. When setting new traps "behind" (i.e., to the south of) the old ones, no permission was required, but if they were set "in front of" the old ones (to the north), whence the polar fox came, it was essential to have the permission of the owner of the old traps, since when the foxes came down, they would be caught chiefly in the new ones. It was not forbidden to hunt other animals at the sites of the traps.

601 The system of kinship among the Dolgans was the classificatory type, 882 and the terms used for kinship were Yakut. The family was of the patriarchal type, but the young people enjoyed great freedom until they married.

● 771 Although the Dolgans were considered Christians and observed the external, ritualistic aspects of Russian Orthodoxy, they also retained their 776 old animistic beliefs. Deities and spirits were divided into three categories (the same as for the Yakuts): ichchi, or incorporeal, invisible beings, who brought to life anything which they entered; ayyy or spirits well-disposed towards humans; abaasy or spirits hostile towards humans and causing various sicknesses and misfortunes; these lived in the earth and in the underworld. A person was believed to get sick and die because the abaasy had stolen his soul and carried it away to the underworld, and then, in- 756 vading the person, proceeded to eat him. The guardians of the people against the wicked spirits and mediators between humans and spirits were [171] the oyun or shamans. The shaman garb and tambourine among the Dolgans were the same as among the Evenks.

776 In their religion the Dolgans worshipped the so-called saytaans. The saytaans could take a great variety of forms, for example, a stone of unusual shape or an ugly wild-deer antler. Any object could be a saytaan if a shaman commanded a spirit, ichchi, to enter it. The saytaans were greatly revered both as family and hunting patrons.

764 The Dolgans buried their dead in the ground. The western (Noril'sk) [531] Dolgans did not usually erect a log structure over the grave, but only left a mound of earth onto which they felled a tree. The eastern Dolgans built log structures over the grave, which they often embellished with intricate carving. A reindeer was slaughtered near the grave and the clothing in which the deceased had died was either left on the ground or hung on the tree.

Folklore

538 The indigenous folklore of the Dolgans was represented by riddles, tales, historical legends, epic poems and stories of everyday life—the latter constituting the predominant type. The stories tell of the nomadic life of the Dolgans in all its real, everyday context. They are brief, but extremely varied in content. Very popular were stories of animals—their origin, their metamorphosis into people and back again. A particular group was composed